

**AFGHAN DOMESTIC WOMEN AS REPRESENTED IN
KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS* AND
ATIQ RAHIMI'S *THE PATIENCE STONE***

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan wanita Afghanistan dalam ranah domestik dan dampak dari dominasi pria terhadap mereka. Penelitian yang berpendekatan kualitatif ini, menggunakan teori feminisme, khususnya feminisme radikal. Data penelitian ini diambil dari 2 novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* karya Khaled Hosseini dan *The Patience Stone* karya Atiq Rahimi. Dalam *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Mariam dan Laila digambarkan sebagai wanita Afghanistan yang tertindas, tidak berdaya, terpinggirkan, dan dieksploitasi dalam ranah domestik. Sedangkan dampak dari dominasi pria terhadap mereka adalah depresi, ketakutan, trauma dan kematian. Hal ini menyebabkan reaksi penolakan terhadap dominasi pria dalam bentuk perjuangan menuntut kebebasan. Sedangkan dalam *The Patience Stone*, karakter wanita yang tidak diketahui namanya, mengalami kekerasan dalam rumah tangganya. Suaminya melakukan kekerasan fisik, seksual maupun mental terhadap dirinya. Hal ini menyebabkan dirinya menjadi frustrasi, depresi dan trauma. Akhir cerita yang tragis sebagai buah dari penindasan pria terhadap wanita Afghanistan dalam ranah domestik yaitu keinginan untuk membunuh suami mereka. Dari gambaran wanita Afghanistan seperti yang di ceritakan oleh Khaled Hosseini dan Atiq Rahimi, pesan moral yang dapat dipetik adalah sistem patriarki dalam masyarakat seharusnya dihapuskan. Karena sistem patriarki ini yang menjadi awal dari dominasi pria terhadap wanita dalam hal ini istri-istri mereka. Seharusnya wanita atau istri dianggap sebagai partner atau pasangan dalam suka dan duka. Bukan sebagai budak atau pelampiasan amarah dan hasrat mereka.

Kata-kata Kunci : *Afghan domestic women, patriarchy, feminism approach*

Abstract: This paper aims to describe Afghan domestic women and the impact of male oppression over them. The research uses qualitative approaches with feminism theory, especially radical feminism. The data are taken from the novels, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Mariam and Laila are described as Afghan women who are oppressed, powerless, marginalized and exploited in the domestic area. The impact of male domination is depression, anxiety, trauma and death either to the oppressor or the oppressed. This leads to the rejection against the dominance in the form of the struggle for freedom. In *The Patience Stone*, a female character whose name is unknown, experiencing violence in the household. Her husband does physical violence, sexual harassment and mental abuse. This caused her to be frustrated, depressed and traumatized. A tragic moment ends the story as the fruit of male oppression against Afghan women in the domestic area, namely the desire to kill their husbands. From the portrait of women in Afghanistan as told by Khaled Hosseini and Atiq Rahimi, a moral value that can be drawn is a patriarchal system of society should be eliminated. Because of the patriarchal system, it will become the beginning of the male dominance to women in domestic area in this case their wives and daughters. Women should be treated as a partner in joy and sorrow. They are not considered as a slave or an outlet for their anger and desire.

Keywords: *Afghan domestic women, patriarchy, feminism approach*

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is a landlocked sovereign state forming part of South Asia, Central Asia, and to some extent Western Asia. Three decades of war made Afghanistan one of the world's most dangerous countries, including for women's and children's life. The average Afghan girl will live to only 45 – one year less than an Afghan male. After three decades of war and repression, an overwhelming number of women remain illiterate in Afghanistan. Afghan girls are also discouraged, sometimes fatally, from seeking an education and Afghan rape victims can be forced, by law, to marry their attacker. More than half of all brides are under 16, and one woman dies in childbirth every half an hour. A large majority, up to 85 percent, of women in Afghanistan give birth with no medical attention. It is the country with the highest maternal mortality rate in the world (Khan, 2012).

Furthermore, violence against girls or women in Afghanistan reached record levels in 2013, according to the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan (AIHRC). Figures released last month show that the six-month period between March and September 2013 witnessed a 25 percent increase in recorded attacks. As Sima Samar, the chair of AIHRC, told Reuters, attacks were more frequent and more brutal, with incidents including “the cutting of women's noses, lips and ears,” and “public rape”. (Diplomat, 2014)

About representation of Afghan domestic women, conflict in Afghanistan has had a disproportionately negative impact on them. Afghan women have borne the brunt of the oppression and remain subjected to practices that reflect gender biases. While the international community still hopes to liberate and empower Afghan women in so-called post-conflict Afghanistan, gender programs are struggling to take gender (in a robust sense of the word) into account. Afghan women are fighting to reverse perceptions that they have no agency, that they are victims. Yet they are experiencing increased levels of violence. Despite being four years beyond conflict and into peace in Afghanistan,

violence against women appears to be increasing (Abirafeh, 2006)

In Afghanistan, representation of women as oppressed, uneducated, and voiceless, has been a long-standing problem. Various factors contribute to high occurrence of domestic violence against women. One of the factors are like economic factors, this case causes women have dependent on their husband so much. Economic dependency to reduce a woman's ability to her husband. Other factors such as low education, patriarchy, high envious to each other and imbalance control.

In patriarchal society, women are considered subordinate to men because of their position in the family and the society. When men feel they are superior to women, violence is more likely to occur. The ideology of putting the male power over women has been institutionalized, internalized and imposed on the society in many government regulation or religious laws. Gardiner as cited in (Robinson and Bessel, 2002 : 12), indicates that “within a traditional culture, there is no room for women as individuals”. She implies that women are continually reminded of their inherent nature, and particularly of their household and reproductive responsibilities, namely to clean, to cook and to raise children. Women are expected to be happy in the role of faithful companions of their husband and as good and caring mothers rather than pursuing their own rights.

In the meantime, the history of Afghanistan speaks the fact that, alongside the oppression imposed by war, this country is among the strongest patriarchal societies that begets more restricted, oppressed conditions for women. However, many scholars disclose how Afghan women fight to survive during the war take part in social participations to reclaim their rights, and further their enhancement over the history of Afghanistan (Ellis, 2000: 74). To illustrate, since the 1950s, women made up 50 percent of university students, 40 percent of doctors, 70 percent of teachers, and 30 percent of civil servants in Afghanistan. A small number of

women even held important political posts and most Afghan women did not wear burqa.

However, the news media is not the only outlet that feeds the images of Afghan women to the readers. Fictional narratives are another vivid source of information for readers and, in particular, for those who do not have firsthand experience with Afghan women. As Appel and Richter (2007 : 170) assert, narrative has an implicit influence on the way people view the world as well as shifting people's worldview. Yet one is left to wonder how popular fictional narratives represent Afghan women to the readers who rely on these outlets as the firsthand source of information.

Much of the relevant literature on this topic speaks to the fact that the dominant portrayal of Afghan women in the media has shown them as passive victims of war and violence, to be liberated only by the Western military intervention. However, the question remains as to how the popular fictional narratives, as another vivid source of information, represent Afghan women to the readers. To address this question, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone*, novels authored by Khaled Hosseini for the first and by Atiq Rahimi for the second one, Afghan novelists, were selected.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a 2007 novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini. It is his second, following his bestselling 2003 debut, *The Kite Runner*. The book was released on May 22, 2007, and received favorable prepublication reviews from *Kirkus*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, and *Booklist*, as well as reaching #2 on Amazon.com's bestseller list before its release. The book focuses on the tumultuous lives of two Afghan women and how their lives cross each other, spanning from the 1960s to 2003. The tragic theme of oppressed hope is explored as the lives of Miriam and Laila pan out from childhood to death. Through the many obstacles that are thrown at these women, the hopes that they hold onto are constantly shattered. Hope for

acceptance, love, and a better life are among many things that the women of Afghanistan hope in the backdrop of war and danger.

A Thousand of Splendid Suns is a great masterpiece since it is generally honest enough to give a more informed and rounded appreciation of the life of Afghan women. Hosseini quickly makes it clear that he intends to deal with the plight of women in Afghanistan and makes the readers think profoundly about life and what they can do for the society despite of all sufferings that society has caused them. Hosseini's novel takes its title from a poem written about Kabul by the seventeenth century poet Saib-e-Tabrizi. It is generally honest enough to visit social and psychological areas away from the hackneyed propaganda of recent years to give a more appreciation of the life of Afghan women.

One of the strengths of the novel is the author's ability to weave historical events into the narrative. On April 17, 1978, around the time that Mariam turns 19, the readers learn that Mir Akbar Khyber has been murdered. Thousands of people turn out on the streets of Kabul in protest; they blame his murder on President Daoud Khan's government. Rasheed tells Mariam that the murder victim was a prominent Communist. She asks him what a communist is. He sneers at her for her apparent ignorance, and then makes a confused attempt to explain. It becomes clear to the reader that he doesn't know either.

Meanwhile *The Patience Stone* is a 2008 novel by the French-Afghan writer Atiq Rahimi. It received the Prix Goncourt. It adopts the viewpoint of women, for whom war can bring both suffering and a curious freedom. The novel tells in its discreet way of the hopeless plight and undeserved oppression of the women in Afghanistan. Atiq Rahimi's novel *The Patience Stone* depicts of the social, economic, religion, and political aspects of the Afghanistan. It shows how are the morality and honesty degraded by politically, socially, economically, and sexually in Afghanistan that can alert any conscious citizen in the world against immorality. A family situation as a

representatives of the Afghan women violence. (Rahimi, 2008)

The Patience Stone, as written in French for *Syngue Saboor*, is Rahimi first's novel in French. The book tells about the wife of a soldier who is lying unconscious with a bullet in his neck, the unnamed heroine of *The Patience Stone* cares for her husband, changes his drip and puts drops in his eyes, all the while unburdening herself of the truth about her feelings toward him against a backdrop of mortar fire and gunshots. Thus he becomes her "Sang-e Saboor," a mythical stone that according to Persian folklore absorbs the pain of those who confide in it, until it eventually explodes.

Both Khaled Hosseini and Atiq Rahimi want to hold the readers transfixed with a gripping account of the appalling conditions of the women in his country, wracked by war, atrocity and under-development. They try to make it clear that Afghan women have to endure the hardships of life, the slights of men, the disdain of society and the struggle against male oppressions. As Hosseini said in introduction of *The Patience Stone* "For far too long, Afghan women have been faceless and voiceless." (Rahimi, 2008 : 1) At a glance in these two novels, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* have revealed the representation of Afghan women, as main characters, who have suffering violence and oppressed as objects of the study.

Since the study tries to explore the domestic life of Afghan women in case of the portrayal of patriarchy society, feminism approach is used to analyze the data. Feminism emerged as a natural reaction to society's treatment toward women. According to Holbrook (1989 : 48), feminism in general is a historical movement to give women equal politic, social, and economic right with men. Feminists try to struggle against treatment given by patriarchal society. They intend to put away the images given to them by men and to prosecute the equality of politic, social, and economic rights. Also they want to be not

dependent on men and to have their own freedom from the men oppression.

Furthermore, women struggle to achieve freedom has become a very dominant theme in literature since the rise and development of feminism, which studies various problems of women and creates awareness among them. Feminism is a criticism of the prevailing social conditions, which have excluded women from the dominant male culture, social, sexual, political and intellectual pursuits.

This study reveals in comparison between two literary works from two different writers of the same countries which have differences and similarities. The study tries to explain how the two writers, Khaled Hosseini and Atiq Rahimi, portray Afghan women on their literary works.

RESEARCH METHOD

The writer used qualitative approaches to analyze how the portrait of Afghan domestic women as depicted in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*, and the impact of male oppression of Afghan women as described in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* as well as the similarities and the differences of the portrait of Afghan domestic women and the impact of male oppression of Afghan women described in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* by using feminism theory, especially radical feminism. According to radical feminist, they claim the patriarchal and gender are characteristics by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition. It must be overtuned on the way to women's liberation (Tong, 2009: 46-47)). The analysis is focused on the portrait of Afghan domestic women, the impact of male oppression of them, and the similarities as well as the differences of portrait of them and the impact of male oppression in two novels.

This study used Tong's theory of feminism. She divided the feminism into four types, they are: liberal, radical, socialist/marxist and psychoanalytic feminism. (Tong, 2009: 11- 162). These types of

feminism could not be separated from the other types of feminism like post-modern and post-structuralist feminism, black feminism because they are quite close in the definition. To make it focus, the feminism theory that is used in this study is radical feminism because the fundamental idea of this feminism is the patriarchy system that happens in the society of Afghanistan and becomes the culture of the people.

DISCUSSION

There are five kinds of representation of Afghan domestic women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. Both of novels have similar and different forms of representation and impact of male oppression toward Afghan domestic women. The five kinds of representation of Afghan domestic women in the novels are oppression, powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation, cultural imperialism and violence. The impacts of male oppression toward Afghan domestic women are physical and psychological ; insult, beating, sexual violence, and killing.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Afghan domestic women are experienced as oppression, powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation, cultural imperialism, and violence. Those kinds of representation are influenced by the socio-cultural background of the country in which the story set in. The characters of Afghan women who experienced the domestic violence are Mariam and Laila. Considering as harami, an unwanted child, Mariam becomes a subject of oppression and violence during her life. Meanwhile, Laila becomes a subject of oppression and violence after her marriage with Rasheed, Mariam's husband. Those women characters have been representatives of Afghan domestic women who experienced oppressed , faceless , powerless, exploited by male domination in domestic area, which is family. It is the husband, Rasheed, who is powerful to cause the suffering of Mariam and Laila.

The second novel is *The Patience Stone* by Atiq Rahimi. The unnamed woman as the representation of Afghan domestic

woman is the victim of man power in patriarchal society. She is as the victim of insult, beating and sexual violence. She is also experienced as oppression, powerlessness, exploitation, marginalization and cultural imperialism. Accumulation of them makes the unnamed woman frustration. The impact of all the accumulation bring depression and to become a talk-active woman.

At the end of the plot, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini it states that Mariam kills her husband, Rasheed. Meanwhile Atiq Rahimi in his novel *The Patience Stone* closes his story that the unnamed woman dies by her husband. Even both of the women intend to kill their husbands. It means, the characters in the novels, all of them are lack of self-control.

In addition to discussing Afghan domestic women and the impacts of male oppression in both novels, the writer also concludes that there are some similarities and differences of these novels. Both of novels tell the similarity of representation of oppressed Afghan domestic women caused by patriarchy system and the problematic and ethnic war Taliban's live in Afghanistan. However, there are some differences. The setting and the end of the plot of the story make the novels differ each other. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* sets in Herat, Kabul Afghanistan to Pakistan . *The Patience Stone* sets in one room. In the first novel, Mariam murders her husband, Rasheed as the end of the story meanwhile the unnamed woman killed by her husband as the end of the plot in *The Patience Stone*.

From two novels, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* the writer discovers representation of Afghanistan domestic women as oppression, powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation, insult, and violence. Afghan women oppression occurs in these novels because of jealousy, lack of power and control, and social stress and rearranged marriage.

To kill or to be killed are high impacts of male oppression towards Afghan domestic women in those novels. There are other impacts that is psychological because of insult. Insult is a mental violence and include a

domestic oppression. Insult has intersect with an incivility. The impact of insult and incivility endure psychological distress, dissatisfaction and disengagement. A husband insults his wife has impacts such as sacrifice her heart, effect of wife's performance and loss of self-confidence. Her mental has decline as a wife. The impact of them in psychological are fear and anxiety, higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-harm and suicide.

Oppression has a significant impact on the health and well-being of women both in the immediate and longer term, continuing even after the relationship has ended. The impact of psychological consequences of oppression is more serious than the physical effects. Psychological impact increases the risk of women developing a range of health problems. Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Unnamed woman in *The Patience Stone* are the victims of male oppression. They are experienced of psychological and physical oppression impact.

Potential domestic oppression that crimes of domestic violence begins with the emergence of imbalance control. Both actors of domestic violence, male domination, have influences in this case. The impact of domestic violence and oppression against women in the novels are disappointed. Accumulates of the women's oppression and powerlessness into disappointment, dissatisfaction and frustration that eventually explodes as the factor to become murderer. Murder is the fruit of oppression and violence. Two women from two novels are murderers.

CONCLUSION

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini presents Mariam and Laila as representations of Afghan women as oppressed, powerless, marginalized, exploited, and violated in their domestic area or family circumstances. Then the impact of male oppression over them described as depression, fear, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is found that those women characters then give their struggle to liberate themselves from man's domination. They give

active struggle in order to be independent women by killing their husband, Rasheed.

In *The Patience Stone*, Atiq Rahimi depicts an unnamed woman told about everything of her condition. It is an extraordinary confession, without restraint, about sex and love and her anger against a man who never understands her. The man maltreats her and never shows to her any respect or kindness. Her admission releases the weight of oppression of marital, social, and religious norms. All of them are other kinds of representation of Afghan Domestic women and the impact of male oppression over them.

From two novels, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* the writer discovers representation of Afghanistan domestic women as oppression, powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation, insult, and violence. Afghan women oppression occurs in these novels because of jealousy, lack of power and control, and social stress and arranged marriage.

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